

From anti-war to a party of war

Rifondazione Comunista mobilizes for Italy's military intervention in Lebanon

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Rifondazione Comunista, the Italian “Party of Communist Refoundation,” is exerting all of its influence to facilitate an Italian military intervention in Lebanon. The national secretariat of the party, which has been part of the centre-left government led by Romano Prodi since April 2006, has welcomed the Italian mission in Lebanon. On October 17, party deputies voted in the Senate in favour of the bill to dispatch Italian troops.

Italy has agreed to send 2,500 soldiers to participate in the UNIFIL mission in south Lebanon. This is the largest contingent from any country for a force which, according to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, is due to be increased from the existing level of 5,000 to a total of 15,000. It is planned that Italy will take over command of the UNIFIL force from France next year. France has also sent a large delegation of troops, while Germany has taken command of naval forces patrolling the Lebanese coast.

The task of the UNIFIL force is to cut off the supply of weapons to the Hezbollah movement. The mission was sanctioned by both the United States and Israel after Israel was unable to destroy Hezbollah despite its massive aerial bombardment this summer. The conflict underscored the widespread popular support for Hezbollah within the Shia population of Lebanon. Now it is up to UNIFIL to complete the task of eliminating or at least neutralising Hezbollah.

The UNIFIL operation in Lebanon, like the NATO-led ISAF force in Afghanistan, will free up the United States to continue its mass killing in Iraq and conduct further provocations against Syria and Iran.

Above all, the mission provides the opportunity for European powers to establish their military presence in a region where they have substantial economic and political interests, but which has been dominated by the US and its closest allies for a long time. The Italian foreign affairs minister, Massimo D'Alema (Left Democrats), justified the Lebanon deployment by declaring it “a great opportunity for Europe, which has never had a large presence in the Middle East but paid the bills without being recognized as a principal player.”

Rifondazione has now taken over the task of securing public approval for this deployment by portraying it as a “peace mission.” A statement issued by the national secretariat on September 14 describes the United Nation's intervention as a means of “halting the war, encouraging dialogue and establishing the possibility of a path towards guaranteed peace between all of the conflicting parties.”

Rifondazione ignores the fact that Italy and other European powers are pursuing their own imperialist interests in the region. For Rifondazione, the Lebanon deployment represents a victory over American “unilateralism,” and it describes the UN, which stood by

while Israel laid waste to much of Lebanon and in which the great powers lay down the line, as an expression of the will of the “international community.” According to the national secretariat statement, “The UN must restore its leading role and Europe must begin to take up an independent initiative.”

The party newspaper *Liberazione* has published a series of articles expressing the growing enthusiasm of the party for the new “peace mission.”

Giovanni Russo Spena, a leading senator of the party, wrote in *Liberazione* (August 19), “The UN mission in Lebanon is a mission which the RC supports with all its conviction. . . With the resolution, which silenced the bombs and rockets in Lebanon and Israel, the United Nations is once again playing its specific and irreplaceable role for the first time in fifteen years. That is an indication of a turn of perhaps historic significance. The end of unilateralism . . .”

The Middle East envoy of the party, Fabio Amato, declared, “The armistice in Lebanon and the confirmation of the UNIFIL mission represent a chance to once again give a voice to politics, diplomacy and also the people's movements. In this regard, the UN has assumed a crucial role . . .”

He made absolutely clear that what is at stake is increasing European influence and Europe's presence in the region. “Europe has demonstrated its independence from the United States,” he wrote, “which could turn out to be the beginning of a new political peace initiative. The conception of a Greater Middle East, as sketched out by Bush, is contrary to any policy which we could defend for Europe and the Mediterranean region.”

Roberto Musacchio, a European deputy for Rifondazione, also joined the choir of those proclaiming a new opportunity for Europe. “There is space for a foreign policy based on cooperation in the Mediterranean, and Europe must occupy this space,” he wrote in *Liberazione* on August 24.

During the recent vote in the Senate it was left to Francesco Martone, the leader of the Rifondazione fraction in the foreign commission, to present the bill on Lebanon. In the course of his presentation he made even more expansive proposals, including the suggestion that “our country consider sending a blue helmet [UN] contingent to the Palestinian areas.”

This open turn from pacifism to militarism exposes the real character of Rifondazione Comunista. In the past the party used left phrases and played a leading role in many protest actions, seeking, in alliance with the trade unions, to contain and control growing social opposition. Having assumed power as part of the government of

Romano Prodi, Rifondazione now operates as a direct agency of the bourgeois state. With 41 deputies in the Chamber of Deputies and 27 in the Senate, the party plays a crucial role in the implementation of the anti-working class policies of the Prodi government.

It is clear that the party's previous rejection of the Iraq war had nothing to do with a principled opposition, based on the independent interests of the working class, to imperialism. Rather, the opposition rested on the national interests of the Italian and European bourgeoisie, which feels increasingly threatened and stymied by the unilateral actions of the US.

As long as Italy was ruled by the right-wing government of Silvio Berlusconi, who had developed a close alliance with George Bush and unreservedly supported the Iraq war, Rifondazione could disguise its nationalist politics behind anti-war rhetoric. Since taking power as part of the Prodi government, Rifondazione has openly embraced the interests of the pro-European section of the Italian bourgeoisie.

The former anti-war party has even gone so far as to organize demonstrations in support of the military deployment in Lebanon. In August, Rifondazione called a demonstration in Assisi under the slogan "Forza ONU" ("UN Forwards"), which praised the UNIFIL mission as the only possible path to peace. A further demonstration is planned for the beginning of November. Already in July, Prodi was able to rely on votes from Rifondazione to increase Italy's contingent of troops in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan from 1,400 to 1,800.

Rifondazione's collaboration with the Prodi government is not limited to the issue of war. There were tumultuous scenes in the Italian parliament at the beginning of October when the government put forward its plans for next year's budget. It calls for savings to the tune of 30 billion euros based on massive social cuts, combined with some tax increases for the upper-middle class. Rifondazione used the right-wing agitation against the tax increases to defend the budget, including the cuts in social benefits.

The turn to the right by Rifondazione is the logical and inevitable consequence of the party's history, political perspective and social orientation.

Rifondazione Comunista was founded in 1992 following the break-up of the Italian Communist Party, whose majority formed the Left Democrats and sought to distance themselves from the CP's name and traditional symbols. The leadership of Rifondazione consisted of long-time Stalinists who feared that the turn to the right by the old CP majority could open up a political vacuum on the left, which could be filled by a genuine socialist movement.

At the heart of Rifondazione's program was the defence of the Stalinist traditions of the Italian Communist Party, which, following the toppling of the Mussolini dictatorship, joined the Italian bourgeois government, helped disarm the anti-fascist resistance movement, recognised the bourgeois constitution, and in every respect proved itself to be a reliable prop of the bourgeois order. Thereafter, the CP worked assiduously to block any movement toward the political independence of the Italian working class, forming alliances with the social democrats and liberal bourgeois parties on the basis of parliamentary manoeuvres and political opportunism.

Rifondazione opened its ranks to various left groups that had emerged in the course of the radicalisation of the 1960s and 1970s. They were allowed to enter the party as organised political factions, with votes and seats on executive bodies. These groups assumed the role of presenting Rifondazione as a revolutionary alternative to reformist parties and politics. A key role was played by a pseudo-Trotskyist group affiliated with the Pabloite United Secretariat and led

by Livio Maitan (who died in 2004). This organisation, Sinistra Critica, played the major part in promoting Rifondazione within the European left as a model "socialist" alternative. It is now playing the central role in opposing and demobilising opposition to Rifondazione's turn to the right within the party and amongst its supporters, and thus ensuring the survival of the Prodi government, which depends on the votes of Rifondazione delegates in parliament for its survival. The group partly abstained, but did not vote against, the deployment of Italian troops to Afghanistan and Lebanon, arguing that there was not sufficient popular support for opposition to such deployments, and that they could not therefore risk jeopardising the Prodi government. In so doing, the Pabloites assumed direct political responsibility for both the militarist turn of Italian imperialism and the austerity measures being imposed on the working class by Prodi.

The deeply reactionary role of the Pabloites is underscored by Rifondazione's efforts to establish links with the most right-wing political forces in Italy. On September 16, Rifondazione's most prominent representative, Fausto Bertinotti, took part in a public discussion with Gianfranco Fini under the heading "Identity as an Italian, of Latin Origin and as a Representative of the West." Bertinotti has been chairman of Rifondazione since 1994 and is the current president of the Italy's Chamber of Deputies. Fini is the head of the neo-fascist National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale).

The meeting took place during the anniversary of the fascist youth organization Azione Giovane in Rome. In the course of the discussion, Fini praised Bertinotti and congratulated him for his "loyalty to his own ideas, which are clearly, however, not my ideas." Bertinotti justified his meeting with the leading representative of a party which has its roots in Mussolini's fascist party with the words, "One must forge links, including between very different positions."

This meeting was an affront and a provocation to all the victims of fascism and those who suffer today from the attacks carried out by extreme right forces. There has been an escalation of brutal attacks by fascist thugs on social centres, squats, refugee housing and youth centres. Only days prior to the amicable discussion between Bertinotti and Fini, a 26-year-old man, Renato Biagetti, was stabbed by two armed thugs as he went home after a concert held at a youth centre in Ostia that has links with Rifondazione.

Bertinotti, who personifies the utterly opportunist character of Rifondazione, looks upon his efforts to "forge links" with the far right as a national imperative in difficult times. The Stalinist party's turn to the right serves to encourage the fascists and poses enormous dangers for the Italian and international working class.

In a similar manner to the Left Party-Party of Democratic Socialism in Germany and the "far left" organisations in France—the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), Worker's Struggle (LO), and Worker's Party (PT)—Rifondazione serves as an important prop of the Italian state. Workers and youth must draw the lessons from the politics, evolution and history of these organisations in the struggle to develop a genuine socialist orientation and program.



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